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LAWRENCE S. FREUND/N.E. BUREAU

ELECTION 76: NEW ENGLAND

ANNCR:

AMERICANS VOTE ON TUESDAY. WITH A PREVIEW OF THE SITUATION IN THE SIX NEW ENGLAND STATES, HERE IS VOA CORRESPONDENT LARRY FREUND:

VOICE:

IN ONE SENSE, VOTING IN THE NINETEEN SEVENTY-SIX PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION BEGAN IN NEW ENGLAND...IN LAST FEBRUARY'S PRIMARY ELECTION IN THE STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE. CANDIDATE JIMMY CARTER WON THE DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY. PRESIDENT FORD WON THE REPUBLICAN PARTY CONTEST. NOW THE TWO MEN FACE EACH OTHER -- AND THE TINY HAMLETS AND VILLAGES IN THE NORTHEASTERN STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE ARE EXPECTED TO REPORT THE FIRST VOTING RESULTS IN THE NATION.

ANALYSTS BELIEVE THAT NEW HAMPSHIRE -- LIKE ITS SMALL NEW ENGLAND NEIGHBOR, VERMONT -- WILL GIVE VOTING MAJORITIES TO PRESIDENT FORD. THE CHOICE OF VOTERS IN THE STATE OF MAINE IS LESS CERTAIN. SOME EXPERTS PREDICT THAT IT MAY GO TO THE PRESIDENT. OTHERS REFUSE TO PREDICT THE RESULTS AT ALL, CALLING THE RACE TOO CLOSE.

THE STORY IS MORE CLEAR IN NEW ENGLAND'S MOST POPULATED STATE -- MASSACHUSETTS -- WHICH IS RATED SOLIDLY BEHIND DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE JIMMY CARTER. MASSACHUSETTS WAS THE ONLY STATE -- ONE OUT OF FIFTY -- TO SUPPORT DEMOCRAT GEORGE MCGOVERN AGAINST RICHARD NIXON IN THE LAST PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. THE DEMOCRATS ARE EXPECTED TO REPEAT THEIR MASSACHUSETTS VICTORY THIS YEAR. AND CANDIDATE JIMMY CARTER IS ALSO VIEWED AS THE LIKELY WINNER IN TINY RHODE ISLAND, ALTHOUGH THE PROBABLE OUTCOME THERE IS LESS CLEAR-CUT.

THE BIGGEST QUESTION MARK IN THE PRESIDENTIAL CONTEST IN NEW ENGLAND IS CONNECTICUT. THE STATE IS AN INDUSTRIAL CENTER, USUALLY SUPPORTS DEMOCRATS AND IS HEAVILY CATHOLIC. BUT REPORTS FROM CONNECTICUT POINT TO DISSENSION WITHIN THE RANKS OF THE STATE'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND TO CONTINUED SUSPICION AMONG MANY ITALIAN-AMERICAN CATHOLICS ABOUT MISTER CARTER. PUBLISHED FORECASTS DON'T HELP. ONE LEADING NEWS MAGAZINE SAYS THE STATE WILL SUPPORT MISTER CARTER. A PROMINENT NEWSPAPER PREDICTS PRESIDENT FORD WILL WIN IN CONNECTICUT. AND ANOTHER WEEKLY SAYS IT CAN'T PICK A WINNER. IN SUMMARY: VERMONT, NEW HAMPSHIRE AND PERHAPS MAINE FOR THE PRESIDENT. MASSACHUSETTS AND RHODE ISLAND FOR MISTER CARTER. AND CONNECTICUT -- TOO CLOSE TO PREDICT.

(OPT) IN OTHER NEW ENGLAND ELECTIONS, DEMOCRAT EDWARD KENNEDY IS BELIEVED TO HAVE A COMFORTABLE LEAD AS HE CAMPAIGNS IN MASSACHUSETTS FOR ANOTHER SIX-YEAR TERM IN THE U.S. SENATE. THE CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN MANAGED BY JOSEPH KENNEDY, THE SENATOR'S TWENTY-FOUR YEAR-OLD NEPHEW AND SON OF THE LATE SENATOR ROBERT KENNEDY. IN CONNECTICUT, REPUBLICAN SENATOR LOWELL WEICKER IS VIEWED AS THE PROBABLE WINNER IN A CONTEST AGAINST DEMOCRAT GLORIA SCHAFFER. SENATOR WEICKER BECAME WELL-KNOWN FOR HIS ACTIVE ROLE IN THE SENATE WATERGATE HEARINGS. ALSO BIDDING FOR RE-ELECTION TO THE SENATE IS EDMUND MUSKIE, THE DEMOCRATIC VICE-PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE EIGHT YEARS AGO. SENATOR MUSKIE -- SEEKING HIS FOURTH TERM IN THE SENATE -- IS CONSIDERED THE LIKELY WINNER.

NEW ENGLANDERS ARE ALSO VOTING ON A NUMBER OF ISSUES, RATHER THAN CANDIDATES. IN MASSACHUSETTS, THEY WILL DECIDE WHETHER TO BAN HANDGUNS, TO ADOPT AN EQUAL RIGHTS LAW FOR WOMEN, AND

WHETHER OR NOT TO REQUIRE THAT SODA BOTTLES BE RE-USABLE INSTEAD OF DISPOSABLE. (END OPT)

GH/RCS